

Testimony of Scott M. Robbins
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
February 23, 2022

**Increase Funding to CT's Independent Living Centers
by 1 Million Dollars**

I have worked at two independent living centers in Connecticut for over twenty years. Independent living Centers serve persons with all types of disabilities and of all ages. I have first hand knowledge of the valuable services that CT's five independent living centers provide to people with disabilities and their families in our state. The centers, which are staffed by qualified persons with disabilities, provide information and referral to thousands of individuals each year, peer counseling, independent living skill training, institutional transition back to the community, youth transition to school and work, advocacy housing, veterans' and deaf services.

The independent living centers are non-residential and provide a single point of entry into disability services, and several are key transition sites under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) state initiative; moving people out of nursing homes back into the community. Not only is transitioning elders and people with disabilities back to the community from nursing facilities the right thing to do, it also saves the state millions of dollars through the enhanced Medicaid match and in institutional care. Independent Living Centers receive limited federal funding, however the funding is to provide **specific** disability services. Without the state funding (through the Department of Aging & Disability Services) the centers would lose their infrastructure that subsidizes MFP, Deaf Services, Aging & Disability Resource Centers, Ticket to Work and other cost saving programs.

In 2004 the Governor appointed State Independent Living Council set a base level of funding for each ILC at \$550K per year, and in 2022, they are still recommending \$550K per ILC. In the past 17 years, the state has **never** achieved this recommended level of funding, and in fact, state funding for ILCs has been reduced. Thanks to the legislature in recent years, we have received an increase but we are still almost \$67K less than what we received in 2015. Please keep in

mind, that in the last 35 years of ILC operations, the cost of living increased by 200%, resulting in deficits on top of reductions, which forced the ILCs to cut back on the towns we serve, laid-off staff, reduced salaries and instituted waiting lists.

CT provides the lowest amount of state funding to its ILCs compared to our adjacent states: In comparison, New York ILCs are state funded at \$335K each and in Massachusetts, \$645K each; CT ILCs, at a paltry \$92K each.

Additionally, the ILCs help hundreds avoid costly institutions each year. By helping individuals across the state to get and keep jobs, the ILCs are contributing to the economy by supporting employees who earn and spend money and pay taxes. Services provided by Connecticut's five Independent Living Centers help individuals live the lives they desire and deliver a substantial return on public investment.

The unintended result of under funding for the centers will be increased Medicaid and Unemployment Compensation costs, even greater reliance on costly state funded services and fewer people maximizing their independence. Many people with physical and psychiatric disabilities will be unable to receive vital support services and many will be stuck in costly institutional settings.

I urge the committee to increase funding to the CT's ILCs by an additional 1 million dollars as recommended by the State Independent Living Council.

Submitted by:

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